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Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation

B.C. HELPS ABORIGINAL LEADERS COMMIT TO SPORTS LEGACY

VICTORIA – The Province has provided $300,000 to bring Aboriginal leaders from across British Columbia together in Saanich in an unprecedented gathering on sport, recreation and physical activity on the eve of the Cowichan 2008 North American Indigenous Games, Michael de Jong, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, announced today.

"This is an exceptionally significant gathering of Aboriginal leaders. For the first time ever, leaders from every corner of the province are working together on a strategy that creates opportunities for Aboriginal people in sport and healthy living," said de Jong. "Supporting Aboriginal youth and their families in leading healthy, active lifestyles is an important part of this government's continuing commitment to close the socio-economic gaps that separate Aboriginal people from other British Columbians."

Organized by the Cowichan 2008 North American Indigenous Games Society, the Leaders Gathering brings together more than 110 First Nations Chiefs, Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine, as well as Métis representatives, a delegation of Aboriginal youth and recreation organizations.

"The Cowichan 2008 Games will showcase elite Indigenous youth sport, but they are also about promoting healthy, active lifestyles," said Dan Smith, member of the First Nations Summit political executive and First Nations Leadership Council. "We want this monumental event to leave a lasting and positive impact for Aboriginal people in British Columbia. This gathering, where Aboriginal leaders have committed to creating an Aboriginal sport, recreation and physical active strategy, is a pivotal step towards achieving the social legacy that will lead to healthier conditions in our communities."

Following the Gathering, participating leaders will travel to Duncan to attend the Opening Ceremonies of the 2008 North American Indigenous Games, where they will march with the athletes in the ceremony's Parade of Nations. An estimated 20,000 competitors and spectators are expected to attend this vibrant and exciting event.

From Aug. 3-10, 2008, Indigenous people from across the continent will visit the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island to attend and participate in the 2008 North American Indigenous Games.

Through the new relationship with Aboriginal people and the Province's commitments to the First Nations Health Plan and the Transformative Change Accord, the government of British Columbia is working to support healthy lifestyles and active Aboriginal communities. For more information about the new relationship, please visit www.gov.bc.ca/arr.

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To learn more about Aboriginal sport and recreation programs in B.C., visit www.tsa.gov.bc.ca/sport/programs/aboriginal_programs.htm.

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